

Pheasant pot pie

By Tom Dickson

Preparation Time: 20 min. | Cooking Time: 35 min. | Serves: 6



When my springer spaniel Simon finds strong pheasant scent, he starts cutting back and forth through the brush like an NFL tailback dodging tacklers. That's how it was this past December while we were hunting a state section in central Montana that sometimes holds a late-season rooster or two.

At the end of a large expanse of snowberry abutting a wheat stubble field, Simon went from his usual fluid weaving pattern into the zigzag overdrive that means he's found birds. Sure enough, pheasants started bursting up from all directions, causing me to spin in place trying to identify the sex of what turned out to be one hen after another. Simon was not so easily distracted. Ignoring the flushing females, he continued racing up a faint furrow leading away from the ruckus toward the open field. There, just within shotgun range, he put up a rooster that I was able to drop with one lucky shot.

Simon was on the dead bird in a flash. But so was Mesa, my wire-haired pointing griffon pup. As Simon tried to retrieve the rooster, Mesa trotted alongside, annoyingly tugging at its head and legs, causing the springer to grip the bird ever more tightly. I heard bones crunch. When he finally dropped the rooster at my feet, I looked down at the crumpled carcass and thought, "Pot pie."

The beauty of pot pies is you can use whatever leftover, shot-up, freezer-burned, or dog-damaged game birds you have on hand. Of course it's best to use fresh, unmarred portions—the taste and texture of damaged meat always suffer—but if you occasionally pummel a bird or own a retriever with a vise-like mouth, you can do worse than cooking the mangled meat with vegetables in a savory, crust-enclosed gravy.

The following recipe combines several I've tried over the years. The crust recipe here is easy as, well, pie, but ready-made ones work fine, too. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

CRUST

2 c. all-purpose flour
 ½ c. canola or vegetable oil
 5 T. water (plus 2 T. for egg wash)
 1 egg (for egg wash)

PREPARATION: Mix oil and 5 T. of water and stir into flour to form dough. Divide into two equal parts. Roll out each part between wax paper to make two pastries.

FILLING

2½ pounds boneless pheasant, grouse, or turkey meat, cut into 1-inch pieces

Salt and pepper

3 T. olive or vegetable oil

3 garlic cloves, minced

3 celery ribs, diced

1 c. butternut squash or carrots, chopped into 1-inch chunks

3 c. chicken stock

5 T. butter

¾ c. all-purpose flour

1 c. heavy cream

1 t. dried rosemary

½ c. frozen pearl onions, cut in half

½ c. frozen peas

PREPARATION: Preheat oven to 375°.

Heat 2 T. of the oil over medium-high heat in a large cast-iron skillet. Salt and pepper meat and add to the pan. Cook until browned, stirring occasionally. Set meat aside. Add remaining 1 T. oil to the pan along with the garlic, celery, and squash (or carrots), and cook until slightly soft. Set aside.

Bring stock to a simmering boil in a small pot. In a saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Whisk in flour for 1 minute. Add stock and cream. Once mixture boils, turn heat down and simmer, whisking all the while, for 5 minutes. Add rosemary and season with salt and pepper.

To the cream mixture, stir in meat and all vegetables.

Place one pastry in a 9-inch glass pie pan. Trim so it's ½-inch wider than the glass edge. Spoon filling into the pastry-lined pan. Top with second pastry. Pinch the two edges together to seal. Cut slits in several places in top for steam to escape.

Make egg wash by mixing egg with 2 T. water. Brush top pastry with mixture. Bake pot pie for 35 minutes or until crust is golden.